

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Office of Fire and Aviation
3833 South Development Avenue
Boise, Idaho 83705

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Information Bulletin No. OF&A 99-026

To: All Field Offices

From: Director, Office of Fire and Aviation

Subject: Work Capacity Testing

On January 11, 1999, a Forest Service (FS) employee in Arkansas suffered a fatal heart attack while taking the Work Capacity Test (WCT). A FS Chief's Office investigation team was assigned. The team's initial findings indicated that the employee had a prior medical condition and that the WCT was an appropriate tool for evaluating performance capability of wildland firefighters. However, the FS has suspended work capacity testing until they are able to review three principal areas identified by the investigation team. The three areas are:

- Pre-participation screening procedures for WCT participants;
- Physical conditioning preparedness of WCT participants;
- Administration procedures of the WCT.

In February 1998, the BLM faced a similar situation when a BLM employee died while practicing for the WCT. At that time, the BLM revised testing procedures related to health screening, physical conditioning and training, and test administration. These changes resulted in the development of required procedures that can be found in the BLM's 1998 Standards for Fire Operations, IM 98-010 Wildland Firefighter Medical Examinations, and IM 98-011 Work Capacity Fitness Tests.

Following careful review of our work capacity testing program, the BLM will continue applying the Work Capacity Tests. The decision is based on our established procedures for health screening, medical examinations, physical fitness training and test administration procedures. (See pages 52 -71 in the 1998 Standards for Fire Operations.) In addition, we believe that 1) work capacity tests accurately evaluate the fitness level of wildland firefighters, and 2) established pre-test health screening and physical examinations provide early warnings of potential health problems in employees preparing to take the test. BLM has shared these procedures with the FS and will continue to work with them in their review process. We will evaluate the results of the FS review for the continued safety and health of our employees.

We must emphasize the importance of employees completing the health screening and starting a fitness program 6 to 8 weeks prior to taking the WCT. An excellent reference document which addresses the health, fitness, and capacity to perform prolonged arduous work is NWCG's Fitness and Work Capacity, second edition, PMS 304-2, April 1997.

Please refer questions to Sandy Guches (208-387-5175) or Roy Johnson (208-387-5163).

Signed by:
Lester K. Rosenkrance
Director, Office of Fire and Aviation

Authenticated by:
Pat Lewis
Supervisory Mgmt. Asst.

Distribution:
Jay Thietten, 5627 MIB
Brian Eldredge, NARTC
Fire Program Manager
Aviation Program Manager
NIFC Administrator